Recent studies indicate that children receive considerable amounts of unwanted attention to their sexuality and appearance. This investigation explored the association between childhood unwanted sexual attention (UWSA) and current self-concept in 448 young women. The frequency of childhood UWSA was associated with poorer academic self-esteem, physical appearance self-esteem, global self-esteem, body image, and body anxiety, after controlling for child sexual abuse. Next, the role of negative emotional reactions to UWSA was explored as a potential moderator between UWSA and impact. It was hypothesized that stronger negative reactions to UWSA would increase the relationship between UWSA and poor self-concept. However, results did not support the moderating role of emotional reactions for the majority of self-concept scores. Overall findings suggest that the objective experience of childhood UWSA is damaging to women's self-esteem and body image, regardless of the subjective reactions women have to the behaviors.

Childhood Unwanted Sexual Attention and Young Women's Present Self-Concept

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Unwanted sexual attention (UWSA) includes unwanted sexual behaviors such as comments, looks, and gestures directed toward one's sexuality and/or appearance. Most girls begin experiencing fairly high levels of UWSA during preadolescence (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993; Whealin, in press) and continue to receive it through adolescence and young adulthood. Recent studies suggest that UWSA is a widespread and potentially damaging problem. Whealin (in press) examined young college women's reports of childhood UWSA. In that survey (N = 315), virtually every participant (99%) reported at least one form of UWSA during childhood and/or adolescence, and 86% reported its occurrence either occasionally or often. Perpetrators were most often other children but also included family members, adult strangers, and school staff. Another study

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sampled 1,632 boys and girls in Grades 8 through 11 for unwanted contact and noncontact sexual behaviors received during school activities (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993).[1] Of these children, 81% reported UWSA. Moreover, of those students who reported experiencing UWSA, 1 in 4 reported that they were frequently targeted.

Children, particularly girls, have predominantly negative reactions to UWSA. Whealin (in press) found that anger was the dominant response to childhood UWSA. Both anger and fear responses were significantly higher than positive reactions to the behavior. In the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (1993) study, 39% of girls reported that school-based UWSA caused them to feel afraid or scared, while only 8% of boys reported having the same feelings. Girls also reported that UWSA caused them to "not want to go to school" (33%), "not want to talk as much in class" (32%), "find it hard to pay attention in school" (28%), "stay home from school or cut a class" (24%), "make a lower grade on a test paper" (23%), "find it hard to study" (22%), and "think about changing schools" (18%). Boys' reports on these items were consistently lower (9% to 13%). Finally, most girls (70%) reported being "very upset" or "somewhat upset" after experiencing UWSA. Only 24% of boys reported this reaction.

Although UWSA is an often chronic, unpleasant experience for girls, the long-term impact of chronic childhood UWSA on girls' self-concept has not been evaluated. However, according to the principles of social learning theory, frequent childhood UWSA should be expected to negatively affect one's self-concept. Social learning theory suggests that children's understanding of their identities is a reflection of how other people react to them (Bandura, 1977, p. vii; Bandura, 1978). When the attitudes of others are negative, a child's attitude of herself or himself is theorized to develop in an unhealthy manner. When teasing or demeaning comments are made about a girl's body, her attitude toward her body, over time, would be expected to become negative. Attention that is not purposefully malicious, even intended as a compliment, could have a negative impact on one's sense of self. Stein (1995), for example, made the case that behaviors such as whistles or stares, particularly those that are undesired, implicitly assert a perpetrator's "right" to judge the recipient. Chronic UWSA, according to social learning theory, would teach recipients to become overly self-conscious regarding their looks and body and eventually see themselves as an object in the eyes of others (Huebner & Fredrickson, 1999).

Support for social learning theory is demonstrated by a study that assessed the related construct of "covert abuse" (Weiner & Thompson, 1997). *Covert abuse* is defined as childhood sexual attention that does not involve physical contact and differs from the UWSA construct in that mutual or desirable

behaviors were not distinguished from those that were undesired. Examples include "Did anyone make comments about how sexy you looked?" and "Did anyone make teasing comments about your developing body?" Results showed that three of six measures of body image and eating disorders were statistically associated with the attention, after controlling for overt sexual abuse. Specifically, scores on a covert sexual abuse scale predicted a significant proportion of variance on the Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale (PASTAS) (Reed, Thompson, Brannick, & Sacco, 1991) and two subscales (Drive for Thinness and Bulimia) of the Eating Disorders Inventory-Bulimia Scale (Garner, Olmsted, & Polivy, 1983). These results suggest that a girl may experience negative consequences from covert sexual attention alone. However, the study did not provide information regarding which people were perpetrating the behaviors. Also, mutuality in childhood sexual relations has been shown to be related to long-term adjustment, with consensual relations related to less negative outcomes (e.g., Finkelhor, 1984; Leitenberg, Greenwald, & Tarran, 1989). Because this study did not distinguish unwanted behaviors from those that might have been desired, a broader assessment of the impact of UWSA still needs to be done.

It is also important that studies distinguish between objective unwanted behaviors and subjective, individual reactions to UWSA. Reactions to UWSA vary from person to person and are often more negative in women compared to men (e.g., Hendrix, Rueb, & Steel, 1998; Whealin, 1999). An alternative explanation for the negative impact found in the Weiner and Thompson (1997) study is that emotional reactions associated with negative interpretations of the behaviors result in low self-esteem and poor body image, rather than the UWSA itself. Some may argue that women who believe the behavior is inappropriate and react with negative emotions will experience stronger negative effects on their self-esteem and body image. However, distinguishing between the objective behavior and subjective reactions to such behaviors has not been done in investigations to date.

This investigation sought to expand on past work by exploring the long-term impact of childhood UWSA on various components of young women's self-concept, including self-esteem and body image. It was hypothesized that frequency of childhood UWSA would predict lower scores on measures of academic, physical appearance, and global self-concept, as well as body image and body anxiety. The second objective of the study was to explore the role that negative reactions have in affecting the relationship between UWSA and long-term psychological adjustment. It was expected that the relationship between frequency of UWSA and the measures mentioned above would

be stronger when reactions to UWSA were characterized by higher levels of negative emotions, such as guilt, fear, anger, or disgust.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 448 women (mean age = 19.4, *SD* = 0.33) recruited from a psychology department research participant pool for a study titled Childhood Messages and who received partial credit in fulfillment of a research requirement. The majority of the women were Caucasian (87.8%), and 9.3% were African American, 1.3% were Asian American, and 1.6% endorsed other. Most of the women were single (95.5%), although 2.9% were married or cohabiting, and 1.6% were divorced or separated. Parents' incomes ranged from $0 to more than $50,000, with fathers' modal income reported at more than $50,000 and mothers' modal income reported at $20,000 to $29,999.

Because child sexual abuse (CSA) and rape tend to co-occur with UWSA (Whealin, 1996) and because such abuse also affects self-concept (e.g., Finkelhor, 1990), this study controlled for these variables. Although definitions of what constitutes CSA vary, the most widely cited is that of Finkelhor (1979), which defines CSA according to age criteria (either before the age of 13 with the perpetrator being at least 5 years older than the victim or during the ages of 14, 15, and 16, with the perpetrator being at least 10 years older than the victim). Based on this definition, 112 women reported CSA. Rape was defined as forced sexual contact after age 18. In all, 45 women met this definition, and 136 reported either type of behavior.

Procedure

The study was conducted with groups of approximately 20 to 60 research participants. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants as an investigation of the psychological impact of childhood messages about gender, appearance, and sexuality. After informed consent was obtained, participants were administered a battery of questionnaires. Participants were administered the Exposure to Sexual Attention Scale (ESAS), which included the Emotional Reactions Checklist; the Personal and Academic Self-Concept Inventory (PASCI); the Body Cathexis Scale; and PASTAS. A subsample of 220 participants also completed the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale

(SDS) and the Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (PANAS). Measures were randomly ordered within a sealed packet to reduce response bias and to help to assure confidentiality of responses during data collection.

Instruments

ESAS. This instrument, developed for the purpose of this study, assesses the frequency (using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 0 = *never* to 4 = *always*) with which participants received different types of UWSA, ranging from sexual comments and leers to verbal coercion (see the appendix). Perpetrators included both adults (such as teachers, parents, other adult relatives, adult strangers, or other adults) and peers (such as students, child relatives, child strangers, or other children). A total score is tallied for the frequency of UWSA received by all perpetrators and could potentially range from 0 to 216 (Whealin, 1996). Items for the ESAS were initially generated by a review of scales previously developed by experts to assess either sexual harassment or sexual abuse. Five selected experts in victimology then reviewed the items to help validate the content. The validity of the instrument was then substantiated by carefully structured, open-ended interviews with persons from the target populations. Participants were first asked to complete the questionnaire. Then each item was given to them in an open-ended, interview format. Follow-up questions were also included to assess whether the participants felt the items were relevant and if they had any difficulty recalling incidences. Results indicated that for this assessment purpose, all items were relevant, easy to recall, and representative of the UWSA construct.

The test-retest stability of participants' responses on the ESAS was calculated by comparing data reported by 90 participants from administrations 2 weeks apart. For items with responses representing continuous variables, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were calculated. Coefficients were statistically significant ($p < .05$), indicating that participants were generally reliable in their reports of mean frequency of different forms of UWSA ($r = .57$ to $.87$) and mean frequency of occurrence from different perpetrators ($r = .61$ to $.89$). Reliability of age of occurrence of UWSA and sex of perpetrator was assessed by means of kappa coefficients. These coefficients were also acceptably high (0.82 to 0.96) (Whealin, 1996).

Emotional Reactions Checklist. This 19-item adjective checklist, originally embedded within the Past Experiences Questionnaire (Shipp, 1986), was developed to assess the emotional reactions of CSA victims to their abuse. Reliability of individual items comprising the scale is good, ranging

from .70 to .96 in a 2-week test-retest study (Long & Jackson, 1993). Long and Jackson (1993) factor analyzed data from 137 victims of CSA and found three factors: guilt/fear, anger/disgust, and positive emotions experienced at the time of the abuse. The validity of the scale is supported by evidence indicating that the response factors are differentially related to subsequent adjustment. For purposes of the present study, the scale was embedded in the ESAS, and the factor-weighted scores for guilt/fear and anger/disgust were summed to yield one negative reaction score. To accommodate answer sheet format, scaling of the items was changed from a 7-point to a 5-point rating scale. Negative reaction scores could potentially range from –21.40 to 42.5.

PASCI. The PASCI operationalizes Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton's (1976) hierarchical, multifaceted model of global, social, physical, and academic components of self-concept and social anxiety. This model, created after an extensive review and explication of the self-esteem literature, makes a conceptual distinction between academic and nonacademic self-esteem. In addition, the multifaceted model considers the need for a multidimensional measure of self-esteem while simultaneously providing a score for global self-esteem. A number of dimensions of particular relevance to college students are sampled.

The PASCI has been shown to be internally consistent and to have test-retest correlations ranging from .81 to .98. Furthermore, the scale has been shown to be convergently valid with measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and it predicted the expected hierarchy of relations for the various aspects of self-concept (Fleming & Whalen, 1990). The measure was normed using freshman and sophomore college students of similar age to those who participated in this study.

Three subscales from the PASCI were used for this study. All are assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The Academic Self-Esteem subscale measures participants' beliefs regarding their ability to perform academically. A sample item is "Are you frequently concerned about your ability to do well in school?" (reverse scored). Physical Appearance Self-Esteem evaluates participants' beliefs regarding their physical attractiveness. Items include "How confident are you that others see you as physically appealing?" and "Do you ever feel you are less physically attractive than you would prefer to be?" (reverse scored). Global Self-Regard assesses overall self-worth. Sample items include "Do you ever doubt you are a worthwhile person?" (reverse scored) and "How often do you feel you have a strong sense of self-respect?"

Body Cathexis Scale. The Body Cathexis Scale (Jourard & Secord, 1954) measures the extent of satisfaction with a wide variety of body parts. The

scale generates a single score that represents the degree of satisfaction with the body as a whole. The originators of the scale stated that it was created to investigate the relationship between body and nonbody aspects of the self-concept. This scale has been used extensively by other researchers and has been linked to self-esteem and dysfunctional eating attitudes (Ben-Tovim & Walker, 1991). Scores on the scale have been significantly correlated with scores on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, suggesting construct validity (Balogun, 1986). Two-week test-retest reliability is high, with a Pearson product moment correlation of .89 (Balogun, 1986).

PASTAS. This 16-item scale developed by Reed et al. (1991) measures anxiety related to one's body. Principal components analysis revealed two components within the scale, labeled *weight related* and *nonweight related.* The Weight-Related subscale has been shown to be highly correlated with body dissatisfaction, appearance evaluation, and eating disturbance. Two-week test-retest reliability is high for both subscales (r = .88, Weight-Related; r = .82, Nonweight-Related) (Reed et al., 1991).

Marlowe-Crowne SDS. This scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) is designed to measure participants' need for approval by responding to tests in culturally appropriate ways. It possesses adequate test-retest reliability and good internal consistency coefficient (alpha = .88).

PANAS. This scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) consists of 10 words that measure pure markers of positive affect or mood and 10 words that measure negative affect. This scale was used with a subset of participants in the present study to assess their current affective state. The scale exhibited significant stability and internal consistency (.89 for positive affectivity and .85 for negative affectivity), and content validity has been supported by factor analysis. The convergent and discriminant validity of PANAS has been supported with various measures of distress and psychopathology.

RESULTS

Of the 448 women surveyed, most (n = 434, 96.9%) reported receipt of UWSA. Consistent with previous research (Whealin, 1996), the most common perpetrator of UWSA was students, with child strangers, adult strangers, and other children following closely. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the variables examined in this investigation. Four

TABLE 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Variables for All Participants and for Participants With and Without Histories of Sexual Abuse (Child Sexual Abuse and/or Rape)

Variable	*All Participants (N = 448)*		*Sexually Abused Group (n = 136)*		*No Sexual Abuse Group (n = 308)*	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
UWSA	22.04	18.63	34.27	24.58	16.63	11.93
UWSA (residual centered)	5.41	18.63	17.64	24.58	0.00	11.93
ERs	2.38	1.02	2.82	1.10	2.18	0.92
ERs (residual centered)	0.20	1.02	0.64	1.10	0.00	0.92
Sex abuse	0.31	0.46	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Interaction (residual centered)	10.00	28.59	23.56	46.85	4.19	10.79
Academic self-esteem	16.18	16.18	14.72	6.27	16.84	5.95
Physical appearance self-esteem	14.57	6.41	13.76	6.35	14.97	6.43
Global self-regard	22.29	5.71	20.88	6.33	23.00	5.26
Body image	34.27	10.20	31.51	9.92	35.57	10.09
Body anxiety	18.58	10.20	21.75	10.76	17.25	9.78

NOTE: UWSA = unwanted sexual attention; ER = emotional reaction.

women did not complete all items on the Emotional Reactions Checklist and therefore were excluded from subsequent analyses.

It was hypothesized that childhood experiences of UWSA would predict lower scores on measures of women's current self-concept. A correlational approach was used to measure the relationship between the frequency of UWSA and measures of self-concept, including academic self-esteem, physical appearance self-esteem, global self-regard, body anxiety, and body image. Hierarchical regression analyses were employed, with separate regression equations for each measure for each specific hypothesis. According to standard procedures for testing moderator variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986), the self-concept score (academic, physical appearance, body anxiety, body image, or global self-regard) was regressed on the sexual assault and UWSA scores in the first step, emotional response to UWSA in the second step, and the product of UWSA and emotional response in the third step. Also, because (a) arbitrary scaling was used in the independent variables and (b) there was a moderately high correlation between cross-products and main effect terms (see Table 2 for correlation matrix), residual centering methods were used as suggested by Lance (1988). Such standardized residual centering decreases the shared variance between predictors thus reducing multi-

TABLE 2: Intercorrelations for Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA), Negative Emotional Reactions, and Outcome Measures

Measure	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
1. UWSA	—	.38**	−.12*	.18**	−.12*	−.12*	−.14**
2. Emotional reaction		—	−.09	.13*	−.12*	−.25**	−.12*
3. PASCI Academic subscale			—	−.27**	.30**	.40**	.43**
4. PASTAS (body anxiety)				—	−.73**	−.57**	−.45**
5. BCS (body image)					—	.69**	.55**
6. PASCI Appearance subscale						—	.63**
7. PASCI Self-Regard subscale							—

NOTE: PASCI = Personal and Academic Self-Concept Inventory; PASTAS = Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale; BCS = Body Cathexis Scale.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 3: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA) and Moderating Variable Predicting Personal and Academic Self-Concept Inventory Academic Subscale Score

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Step 1[a]				
Sexual abuse	−1.50	0.69	−.11	.03*
UWSA	−0.03	0.02	−.10	.05*
Step 2[b]				
Sexual abuse	−1.52	0.69	−.11	.03*
UWSA	−0.03	0.02	−.11	.06
Negative reaction	−0.06	0.32	.01	.84
Step 3[c]				
Sexual abuse	−1.55	0.69	−.11	.03*
UWSA	−0.05	0.02	−.16	.02*
Negative reaction	−0.02	0.32	−.00	.96
Interaction UWSA × Negative Reaction	−0.02	0.01	−.09	.15

a. $R^2 = .033$.
b. $\Delta R = .000$.
c. $\Delta R = .004$.
*$p < .05$.

collinearity between variables and yielding smaller standard errors for the interaction term.

Results of these analyses supported the hypothesis that women's current self-concept is predicted by childhood experiences of UWSA. Specifically, results of Step 1 of each analysis showed the UWSA score predicted academic self-esteem ($B = -.03$, $p = .05$, Table 3), physical appearance self-esteem ($B = -.05$, $p = .01$, Table 4), global self-regard ($B = -.04$, $p = .02$,

TABLE 4: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Nonphysical Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA) and Moderating Variable Predicting Personal and Academic Self-Concept Inventory Appearance Subscale Score

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Step 1[a]				
Sexual abuse	–0.26	0.74	–.02	.72
UWSA	–0.05	0.02	–.14	.01*
Step 2[b]				
Sexual abuse	–0.05	0.73	–.00	.94
UWSA	–0.03	0.02	–.08	.16
Negative reaction	–0.96	0.34	–.15	.00*
Step 3[c]				
Sexual abuse	–0.07	0.73	–.01	.92
UWSA	–0.04	0.02	–.11	.09
Negative reaction	–0.99	0.34	–.16	.00*
Interaction UWSA × Negative Reaction	–0.01	0.01	–.06	.32

a. $R^2 = .02$.
b. $\Delta R = .02$.
c. $\Delta R = .00$.
*$p < .05$.

TABLE 5: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Nonphysical Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA) and Moderating Variable Predicting Personal and Academic Self-Concept Inventory Self-Regard Subscale Score

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Step 1[a]				
Sexual abuse	–1.32	0.64	.11	.04*
UWSA	–0.04	0.02	–.13	.02*
Step 2[b]				
Sexual abuse	–1.28	0.66	–.10	.05*
UWSA	–0.03	0.02	–.11	.05*
Negative reaction	–0.21	0.30	–.04	.48
Step 3[c]				
Sexual abuse	–1.29	0.65	–.11	.05*
UWSA	–0.04	0.02	–.14	.03*
Negative reaction	–0.24	0.30	–.04	.43
Interaction UWSA × Negative Reaction	0.01	0.01	.06	.36

a. $R^2 = .04$.
b. $\Delta R = .00$.
c. $\Delta R = .00$.
*$p < .05$.

TABLE 6: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Nonphysical Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA) and Moderating Variable Predicting Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale Score

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Step 1[a]				
Sexual abuse	1.84	1.14	.08	.11
UWSA	0.14	0.03	.26	.00*
Step 2[b]				
Sexual abuse	1.74	1.14	.08	.13
UWSA	0.13	0.13	.24	.00*
Negative reaction	0.46	0.53	.05	.39
Step 3[c]				
Sexual abuse	1.76	1.14	.08	.12
UWSA	0.14	0.04	.26	.00*
Negative reaction	0.50	0.53	.05	.35
Interaction UWSA × Negative Reaction	−0.02	0.02	−.04	.46

a. $R^2 = .09$.
b. $\Delta R = .00$.
c. $\Delta R = .00$.
*$p < .05$.

TABLE 7: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Nonphysical Unwanted Sexual Attention (UWSA) and Moderating Variable Predicting Body Cathexis Scale Score

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Step 1[a]				
Sexual abuse	−2.67	1.15	−.12	.02*
UWSA	−0.07	0.03	−.14	.01*
Step 2[b]				
Sexual abuse	−2.55	1.16	−.11	.03*
UWSA	−0.06	0.03	−.11	.05*
Negative reaction	−0.54	0.53	−.05	.31
Step 3[c]				
Sexual abuse	−2.58	1.15	−.12	.02*
UWSA	−0.08	0.04	−.15	.02*
Negative reaction	−0.59	0.54	−.06	.27
Interaction UWSA × Negative Reaction	−0.02	0.02	.06	.32

a. $R^2 = .05$.
b. $\Delta R = .00$.
c. $\Delta R = .00$.
*$p < .05$.

Table 5), body image ($B = .14, p = .00$, Table 6), and body anxiety ($B = -.07$, $p = .01$, Table 7).[2]

To test the hypothesis that poorer self-concept would be moderated by negative emotional reactions to UWSA, moderator effects were analyzed by entering the residual interaction term on Step 3 (thus controlling for UWSA and emotional reaction scores). Results of analyses generally did not support this hypothesis. Most self-concept scores were not moderated by negative emotional reactions to UWSA (see Tables 3 through 7, Step 3), with the exception of physical appearance self-esteem. Negative reactions did moderate the relationship between UWSA and this component of the self-concept (see Table 4, Step 3). When attitudes about one's physical appearance were poor, the relation between frequency of UWSA and negative reactions intensified. The highest negative reactions were reported by women who had poor physical appearance self-esteem and who reported a high frequency of UWSA. The lowest negative reactions were reported by women who had poor physical appearance self-esteem and who reported less frequent UWSA.

DISCUSSION

Social learning theory predicts that because of its repeated nature, chronic UWSA will become internalized as part of one's self-concept. Girls begin receiving UWSA during preadolescence (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993; Whealin, 1996), just when the sense of self begins to become consolidated with the view from others (Erikson, 1968). Children's sexual thinking matures during puberty, when development requires that a child must consolidate a sense of self with the view of others (Erikson, 1968). Social learning theory predicts that repeated UWSA during preadolescence and adolescence is likely to lead a girl to incorporate such messages into her sense of self, resulting in a more objective rather than subjective view of herself. To meet external demands, the girl would then internalize others' opinions about her appearance as important. Indeed, research supports that the objectification women receive over time socializes them to defer to others' perspectives at the expense of their own point of view (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The findings suggest that repeated childhood UWSA did affect women's sense of self across several salient areas. Because UWSA is directed toward girls' physical appearance and body, it follows that poor body image was predicted by frequent UWSA during childhood. Body image encompasses attitudes and feelings toward the body, including one's size, weight, or any other

aspect of the body that determines physical appearance. Teasing and/or demeaning comments over time can be internalized, eventually damaging young women's attitudes about their bodies. The results suggest that UWSA may play a role in the high levels of dissatisfaction with and anxiety about one's body that has been shown to be common among females (Thompson & Thompson, 1986). The findings also support and expand on findings that covert sexual abuse lowers body image scores (Weiner & Thompson, 1997).

Lower global self-regard is also to be expected when girls receive messages from many areas that they are not valued for their own subjective needs and feelings, for these message imply that their perceptions and feelings are secondary to those of others. Results of the study suggest that UWSA may be a factor that contributes to the severe drop in self-esteem many girls experience during preadolescence and adolescence (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1992). Research has shown that early maturing girls are particularly prone to poor self-esteem and body image (Duncan, 1985). The current findings support clinical reports that girls who mature early struggle with sexual attention from men, without being prepared emotionally to deal with it.

The finding that high frequency of UWSA predicted poorer academic self-esteem in this sample of young college women is also troubling. As noted earlier, teen and preteen girls report that school-based UWSA led them to avoid school activities, such as classes and studying. They also report that UWSA makes it difficult for them to pay attention in class (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993). Qualitative studies of school environments indicate that girls are quite distressed by UWSA by peers at school, which is often compounded when teachers ignore or trivialize the behaviors (Herbert, 1989; Lewis, Hastings, & Morgan, 1992). In a 1992 *Seventeen* magazine survey, thousands of preteen and teenage girls pleaded for some acknowledgment, attention, and justice for the chronic UWSA they received while at school (Stein, Marshall, & Tropp, 1993). When teachers discount peer UWSA, they are training girls to accept abusive behavior and therefore are interfering with girls' right to receive equal education opportunities (Stein, 1995).

With the exception of physical appearance self-esteem, the objective experience of childhood UWSA had a damaging effect on many salient components of women's self-concept, regardless of the subjective emotional response of the recipient. Such findings suggest that the reported emotional response may not be so important as the actual behavior when considering the impact of UWSA. Previous studies of sexual harassment in educational and work settings has shown that not all recipients feel they are affected by the behaviors (e.g., Erickson & Rapkin, 1991). Although emotional reactions to

UWSA are important, the practice of using participant's self-reported reactions as a measure of UWSA's impact may be problematic.

It should be noted that the effects of UWSA were relatively small when compared to those of CSA. In this study, the presence of physical CSA contributed to lower scores on academic self-esteem, global self-regard, and body satisfaction that were independent of the impact of UWSA. Future studies are needed to understand just how extensive are the ramifications of UWSA and how the experiences of UWSA and CSA may interact. The role of UWSA does remain an important finding, however, given that the effects of present affect, social desirability, and CSA were statistically controlled in this study.

It is important to note that the study is limited by its retrospective nature and reliance on self-report. Despite the test-retest stability of responses, self-report of self-esteem and UWSA may be to varying degrees unreliable, which increases possibility that these measures are correlated with each other by chance. Alternative explanations for the findings need to be considered. In addition, it should be noted that participants in the research were university students from a predominantly White, middle-class background. It will be important to replicate the findings with more culturally, ethnically, and economically diverse participants, who may have different perspectives and experiences with UWSA.

In conclusion, the study supports an expanded conceptualization of sexual abuse. Sexual behaviors, beyond those assessed by widely used measures of CSA, can be recognized as detrimental to girls. This expanded view of sexual abuse parallels recent studies of other forms of noncontact abuse. Such studies have revealed that emotional forms of spousal abuse, for example, may account for poor self-esteem and posttraumatic stress symptomatology (Arias & Pape, 1999) previously attributed to physical battery. Similarly, studies of childhood emotional abuse by parents show that verbal abuse accounts for both psychological and physical problems during adulthood when controlling for contact sexual abuse (e.g., Moeller, Bachmann, & Moeller, 1993) and also differentially affects self-esteem compared to physical and contact sexual abuse (Mullen, 1996).

The results of this study also have important implications for clinical and educational interventions. The extent and severity of many of the behaviors indicate that a considerable number of girls are targets of chronic, harmful acts perpetrated to a large degree by other children. Although disciplinary action is sometimes taken against adults who sexually abuse a child, the stigma attached to these behaviors has historically caused teachers and parents to avoid addressing perpetration by children and adolescents. By not intervening, families, communities, schools, and society silently affirm these

aggressive behaviors. Our educational, legal, and social systems must recognize the role that UWSA and emotional abuse have on the lives of young people. The power of verbal messages can no longer be denied.

APPENDIX
Unwanted Sexual Attention Items

Before age 18, did any of the following people[3] ever

1. make sexual comments or tease you about your looks, body, or sexual development when you didn't want them to?
2. give you sexually "leering" looks or flirt, whistle, or wink in a sexual way when you didn't want them to?
3. call you obscene names of a sexual nature or make sexual gestures toward you when you didn't want them to?
4. make accusations about your sexual behavior or sexual orientation or spread sexual rumors about you when you didn't want them to?
5. create a sexually charged environment for you when you didn't want them to, for example, by talking about sexually explicit topics in front of you when you didn't want them to or showing/giving/talking to you about pornography or "dirty" cartoons, messages, videos, and so forth?
6. make you feel like he or she wanted you to meet his or her sexual needs, try to pressure you for sexual acts, or threaten you or someone else in an attempt to make you engage in sexual acts when you didn't want them to?

NOTES

1. The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (1993) study assessed sexual harassment, which is a similar construct to unwanted sexual attention, in that neither behavior is desired or solicited by the recipient. Both behaviors lack the mutuality present in interpersonal flirtation, flattery, and/or requests for a date. However, sexual harassment is a legal definition generally used in institutional (employment or education) settings. The term also contains an implicit subjective component in that it must be considered offensive and thus interfere with an individual's work or school performance. This subjective component makes assessment of the construct problematic in scientific investigations (see Lengnick-Hall, 1995). The term *unwanted sexual attention*, which includes accounts of perpetration by any source in any setting, is preferable for the present purposes.

2. Similar results were found when the negative reaction score was divided into anger/disgust reactions and guilt/fear reactions. Results similar to the above were also found when controlling for social desirability and current affective state for a subsample of women ($n = 220$) who were administered those questionnaires.

3. The questionnaire includes nine items querying for each of the following potential perpetrators: Parents, Adult Relatives, Child Relatives, Teachers, Other Students (while at school), Adult Strangers, Child Strangers, Other Adults, Other Children.

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